

Blues well and truly in the doldrums

BISHOP'S STORTFORD 1, WANDERERS 5

Bishop's Stortford's heaviest Isthmian League defeat was aptly summed up afterwards by secretary Brian Bayford with the comment: "They really took us to the cleaners." Once again the Blues were but a pale shadow of the side which did so well earlier in the season.

Various reasons have been put forward for this decline, but undoubtedly the absence of suspended John Still from the back four was the prime reason for the first home league defeat this term.

With big John missing the rear-guard looked decidedly suspect, and one felt sorry for goalkeeper Tony Wiseman, who was given the minimum of cover.

Indeed, it began to look as though the Blues were going to be really humiliated when Wycombe went 4-1 up eight minutes after the interval, but then skipper Dave Lawrence forsook the midfield to bring some semblance of order at the back.

Last season's league champions were restricted to one additional goal, but it is doubtful if they have collected an easier two points during the current campaign.

If Stortford were weak at the back, they were no better up front. The occasions on which Maskell, the Wycombe goalkeeper, had anything more serious to do than cut out hope-

ful crosses could have been counted on the fingers of one hand—with some to spare.

There was a hint of what was to come when the visitors opened the scoring after 10 minutes. Although the build-up was slow, any one of three players could have applied the finishing touch, so slack was the Stortford marking. In the event it was Pritchard who drove the ball into the net.

Drew level

Although they failed to appreciate the futility of lofting high balls into the Wycombe penalty area, where they were easily cut out by the visitors' tall defenders, Stortford drew level in the 24th minute with a superb goal which was just about the only bright spot in an otherwise gloomy afternoon. John Dear took a corner on the right, and Dennis Francis headed in with such power that Maskell hardly had time to move.

For a brief spell Stortford showed

some signs of being able to pull the game round, but they never moved with the same degree of fluency as the opposition, and at half time were facing a 3-1 deficit.

After 34 minutes a quick Wycombe break caught the Stortford defence in complete disarray, and Swain steered his shot past the advancing Wiseman. Six minutes later the visitors were awarded a free kick just outside the box, and Wiseman allowed Horseman's shot to pass under his body.

Stortford's misery was increased within eight minutes of the restart. A sharp Wycombe break got the defence in a tangle, and after enticing Wiseman off his line in a desperate attempt to retrieve the situation, Hutchinson crossed for Searle to score a simple goal.

Lawrence's switch had a steadying effect at the back, but Wycombe pulled further ahead as the result of a bad mistake by Dear. He made a complete hash of an intended back pass to Wiseman, and Horseman

pounced to shoot past the helpless goalkeeper.

With the points safely in the bag Wycombe were content to conserve their energy in the closing stages of the game. The Blues were somewhat more aggressive, but desperation was written boldly over a lot of their play.

Turned down

They had a confident appeal for a penalty turned down shortly before Neil Bunker was substituted for Martin Smith and saw Maskell make a good one-handed save from Dear who was, for once, left unmarked.

Bishop's Stortford: A. Wiseman; M. Davenport, R. Coombes, R. Mitchell, P. Scott, D. Lawrence, P. Leakey, D. Francis, A. Davidson, M. Smith, J. Dear. Sub., B. Davidson.

Wycombe Wanderers: J. Maskell; I. Rundle, P. Birdseye, D. Bullock, J. Delaney, R. Williams, J. Hutchinson, L. Pritchard, K. Searle, K. Swain, A. Horseman. Sub., A. Game.